

## Report

# Living between two fires: villager opinions on armed insurgency

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## I. Introduction

The mountains and thick jungle of the area between Mon State's southern Ye Township and northern Yebyu District in northern Tenasserim Division make it an ideal staging ground for armed rebels. Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) government's desire to fully control the countryside – a desire strengthened by the proximity of gas pipelines – have led to intense militarization of countryside as the government fights to pacify the area. The high concentration of SPDC battalions and the scorched earth tactics they employ in their operations against rebels means that the area is consistently the site of the worst human rights violations on Burma's southern peninsula.

In November, HURFOM extensively documented abuses committed by SPDC army battalions in the Ye and Tavoy. This report continues to focus on the region, and provides an update on SPDC abuses documented since November. The primary focus of this report, however, is instead on the relationship between armed rebels in the area and the villagers upon whose support they depend. After first describing armed groups in the area, it focuses on the group that has been most active lately, known after its leader Nai Chan Dein. Nai Chan Dein has developed a fearsome reputation amongst both the SPDC army he fights and the villagers he heavily taxes; for many villagers, he is to be feared as much as SPDC battalions. Life in parts of Ye and Tavoy, then, requires a delicate balancing act as villagers work to avoid abuse from both sides. "We are normal people who have to be afraid of both groups," a villager in Tavoy told HURFOM. "Between the two groups, we have no chance."

The bulk of this report provides forum for villagers to air opinions on the Nai Chan Dein group and armed resistance in general. Responses are selected from nearly 50 interviews conducted during January with current residents in Ye and Tavoy, as well as former residents who have since fled. This report should not be taken as an opinion survey, however, for its sample size is too small and its subject selection necessarily biased. Sources quoted in this report are, for safety's sake, only subjects willing to run the risk of speaking with announced reporters. Instead, the point of this report is to give voice to people on whose behalf war is ostensibly being waged.

## II. Mon Rebels, and abuse

### A. Fertile forests, for farmers and fighting

Average income in southern Ye Township in Mon State and northern Tavoy District in Tenasserim Division is low, and many people survive on just 20,000 to 25,000 kyat a month (\$16 to \$20 USD). The area's many betel nut and rubber plantations are relatively bountiful, however, and economic circumstances for the area's primarily ethnic Mon, Karen and Tavoyan residents are comparatively strong. Indeed, employment opportunities – and deliberate resettlement efforts by SPDC battalions – have drawn increasing numbers of ethnic Burmans to the area. The mountains and jungle in the area also mean that it remains a place in which armed insurgents continue to operate. Until the mid 1990s, at least thirteen groups conducted operations in the area though most have now disbanded or signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC, most notably the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) in 1995. The MNLA is the armed wing of the largest Mon political party, the New Mon Start Party (NMSP).

The number of armed groups has shrunk in the last decade and a half, with just a few now remaining. The largest and most established is Brigade No. 4 of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU). The second group is the Monland Restoration Party (MRP), known as the Hongswatoi Restoration Party until 2003, formed by colonel and MNLA second-in-command Nai Pan Nyunt after he left the NMSP in 2001. The area also continues to be home to groups without official names, and who are known simply by the names of their leaders. In the last few years, this has included groups led by Nai Hloi, Nai Bin, Nai San Shay, Nai Chan Dein and Nai Mon M'raw, though none have recently commanded more

than 20 to 30 followers. Many of these groups frequently launched joint-operations together, joining the MRP or operating independently of MRP control, but still under the name of the MRP.

## **B. The Nai Chan Dein group**

This report primarily deals with Nai Chan Dein because he remains the most active and – more importantly in terms of collecting opinions – he has developed an outsize reputation. Nai Chan Dein began his operations in 1993 when, then an MNLA private, he was instructed to escort 4 other MNLA soldiers who were slated to be punished at NMSP headquarters. According to an MNLA colonel who commanded Nai Chan Dein, the group never arrived at their ordered destination. The dead bodies of the 4 soldiers were eventually found but their weapons, and Nai Chan Dein, were gone.

Nai Chan Dein has managed remarkable longevity, though he has often worked with or joined groups like the MRP and those lead by Nai Bin and others. The NMSP, which has a vested interest in keeping tabs on his activities, estimates he currently only has 20 to 30 soldiers under command. The Nai Chan Dein group, like many of the remaining armed insurgent groups in Burma, does not control territory. Instead, it moves frequently, relying on supporters and informers in local villages and superior knowledge of local terrain. “Even though [I do not support him], one can see that he has very good skills,” the NMSP colonel who once commanded him told HURFOM. “He knows the area very well and knows where he can hide his group and how he can escape the Burmese army. That is why he can still maintain his troops and still fight.” The most recent report of clashes with SPDC troops are from June 2008, when a captain and four soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31 were killed on June 10<sup>th</sup> in a joint MRP-Nai Chan Dein attack. Later that month, 3 of Nai Chan Dein’s soldiers were killed in another clash with Burmese soldiers. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, LIB No. 299 ambushed 5 Nai Chan Dein soldiers as they rested for lunch near Ko Mine village, Ye Township. Three soldiers were killed, as was as a civilian from a nearby rubber plantation that the soldiers had conscripted as a porter. According to the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA), LIB No. 299 based its attack on a tip from a local government informer.

According to a later report by IMNA, Nai Chan Dein also believed the attack to have been based on information from a local informer. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, the Nai Chan Dein group attacked a group of forest workers near Ko Mine village. Three were killed and another 12 injured. Significantly, all the victims were ethnic Burman from outside Mon State. Nai Chan Dein is passionately Mon nationalist, and his antipathy for ethnic Burmans and ethnic Mons who speak Burmese rather than Mon is well known. In April 2005, his group interrupted festivities for the New Year’s Water Festival near Kyaik Dae Meh Kaloh pagoda in Khaw-zar Sub-township. Drawing a line on the ground with the barrel of his rifle, he ordered Mon language speakers to one side and non-Mon speakers to the other, regardless of their ethnicity. Eleven of the non-Mon speakers were killed.

The Nai Chan Dein group, like many armed insurgent groups, has supported itself by gathering intelligence, food and monetary support from local villagers. In the last two months alone, at least 5 villages in an area of northern Tenasserim Division have each been ordered to pay Nai Chan Dein 5 to 7 million kyat each. Names of taxed villages are being withheld to protect them from punishment by the Burmese army. The taxes are high, especially this year while betel nut and rubber prices are unusually low. “This year the rubber price has decreased, also betel nut,” IMNA quoted a resident in early January. “We have to pay money to the Chan Dein group. We have a big problem, we don’t know how we are going to survive for this year.” Betel nut is selling for 800 kyat per viss, down from 3,000 last year and rubber is worth a quarter of its value last year. Another villager quoted by IMNA agreed: “I planned to be married this year. But I am not so sure I can because I will have to spend 2 million kyat, and my family will have to pay this money to Chan Dein instead.”

Demands for support from the Nai Chan Dein group are viewed as compulsory, understandably so for Nai Chan Dein has a fearsome reputation. “If Chan Dein becomes angry he will do anything he wants. Some times he points the gun at villagers and sometime he tortures and sometimes he punches the villagers,” said a resident of Alae Sakhan village, Yebyu Township. Villagers are also kidnapped and held for ransom. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, for instance, the group kidnapped over 100 people from 5 villages in southern Ye Township as they traveled to their plantations. According to a report by IMNA, the captives included 62 plantation owners, who were released for ransoms of 200,000 kyat each and 40 workers, who each had to pay 30,000.

## **III. SPDC army, and abuse**

### **A. Abuses, since 1948**

That villagers meet the demands of Nai Chan Dein is a testament either to the fear with which they regard him or the worthiness with which they view his cause. Because any support for a rebel group, regardless of whether



**SPDC troops patrolling in southern Ye Township**

it is voluntary or compulsory, risks harsh punishment from SPDC battalions. "I have to be afraid of both Burmese troops and the Nai Chan Dein group," Mi Myint Myint Aye, 30, a vegetable seller from Kalaw village, told HURFOM. "I worry about meeting with the Chan Dein group. If they find me [when I travel between villages to buy or sell vegetables], I will have a problem. And when I get back into my village, the soldiers will ask me if I met with the rebel group or not. Our life is like living between two fires. It is always hot. I just want to live in a peaceful way to support my family."

Civilians have been caught in the middle of Burma's protracted conflicts since virtually the moment the country gained independence

in 1948. Unarmed villagers are not, however, simply "caught in the crossfire" as "collateral damage." Instead, Burma's central government deliberately targets civilians in a coordinated effort to weaken the armed groups whom the villagers support. This strategy assumed a formal name in the 1960s: Pya Ley Pya, or the "Four Cuts" strategy. The name refers to various tactics designed to cut rebels off from supplies of food, funds, intelligence and recruits. The name technically refers to a systematic practice of clearing rebel areas from all civilians. Areas are classified as "black" areas – in counterpoint to "white" government controlled zones – and every person is assumed to be, and treated as, a rebel supporter. Officially, Pya Ley Pya has ended, but SPDC troops continue to target civilians in areas of rebel activity.

## **B. Abuses, since November**

The area between southern Ye Township and northern Yebyu is classified as a black or grey area, and SPDC battalions have committed an astonishing array of human rights violations in their offensives against armed rebels, including Nai Chan Dein's group. In November, HURFOM released a report extensively documenting 4 categories of abuses in the area:

- A. Interrogation, assault and summary execution
- B. Travel restrictions and surveillance
- C. Punitive taxation, quotas and looting
- D. Forced labor, including conscription of porters and human minesweepers for military operations

These abuses have continued unabated since the release of the report. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, a group of 80 soldiers from IB No. 107 forced all 60 households in Amae village, Yebyu Township, to pay 50,000 kyat per household and then abandon their homes and plantations. The villagers were given virtually no time to prepare for their departure, and local sources said they were forced to abandon the majority of their belongings, as well the timber and other valuable construction materials in their homes. The soldiers assaulted at least one villager as they ordered the villagers to relocate. "One young man from the village asked the captain, 'if you do like this, where will we go to live?'" said an eyewitness from Amae. "The captain replied, 'you can go and live anywhere, but not in this area.' After that, he grabbed the young man and hit him in the head with the butt of his rifle. Once the young man had fallen down, the captain hit the young man's leg and it broke." According to another source from Amae, on the same day soldiers also raped a seventeen-year-old girl working on a betel-nut plantation nearby. The resident, who spoke with the victim's mother and then quoted her to HURFOM, said that she was crying the whole time she told the story. "My daughter is only seventeen-years-old. She was raped by seven soldiers," the source quoted the mother. "Those soldiers are not human. They are like animals. They are the same evil, both the captain and his soldiers. My daughter nearly died, and now she has tried to kill herself many times."

In spite of the relocation order, some villagers later returned to Amae to retrieve belongings and building materials, and even to sleep in their old homes for short stretches while they tended to nearby farms. In the first week of January, however, a group of 30 soldiers from IB No. 107 returned to the village and arrested Amae's headman, who had recently returned to the village with a small group of former residents. According to an eyewitness, the soldiers beat his head and body with their fists and the butts of their rifles, and then took him to battalion headquarters in Tavoy. A week later, his family began holding traditional funeral services, indicating that he had been killed. A HURFOM source that spoke with the family also confirmed that the battalion had

admitted its fault, insofar as it had paid the headman's family 30,000 kyat (\$24 USD) in compensation for his death.

According to a man working on his betel nut plantation near Amae, a few days before the headman's arrest, two young men were killed on their way to retrieve belongings from Amae. "The two young men were walking to Amae village, on the way I could hear them singing a Mon song. After a while, I heard the sound of guns firing four or five times, around noon." The source, who lives in a village less than 2 kilometers from where the boys were staying, said that the next day he heard that two boys, ages 15 and 17, had been shot near Amae.

Residents of Amae were accused of being Nai Chan Dein supporters and forced to relocate and prohibited from returning to the area. Elsewhere, SPDC battalions continue to detain, interrogate and abuse villagers suspected of supporting Nai Chan Dein. After Major Nyi Nyi Soe, commander of Column No. 2 from LIB No. 282, heard of taxes demanded from villages in Yebyu, he called meetings with their village headmen to intimidate them out of providing the support. "If I hear a village gives money to the Mon rebel group," a villager quoted him to HURFOM, "all the villagers in that village should wait and see what will happen." Nyi Nyi Soe has a fearsome reputation among villagers, and is called "Bo-Latt-Tee," meaning "Punch Major." Nyi Nyi Soe then instituted a 6pm to 6am curfew, preventing villagers from attending to their rubber plantations in the pre-dawn hours when rubber must be tapped. He also ordered villagers to form rotating patrols, in which villagers have to form the first line of defense against the Nai Chan Dein group, armed only with what knives, agricultural or hunting implements they possess. As one Amae villager quoted in the November report said, "We are like the protective cover of the army. It means we villagers will die first."

Perhaps nothing illustrates better the difficult position of villagers than the treatment of Yin Ye residents at the end of November. During the day on November 21<sup>st</sup>, residents working on their rubber plantations were kidnapped and ransomed by the Nai Chan Dein group, along with over 100 other people from area villages. At midnight on the same day, troops lead by Lieutenant Han Win Kyaw of IB No. 31 entered the village and arrested and interrogated 6 villagers. According to IMNA, at least one man was tortured by having his bare arms held over a burning torch. Lieutenant Command Myo Swe returned the next day and arrested 7 more people, one of whom was badly beaten after he stuttered during questioning. Villagers were then put on 24-hour travel restriction, and prohibited from visiting their plantations. The fact that the support they provided Nai Chan Dein was involuntary made no difference.

## **IV. Go to other villages and you will hear people talking like me: villagers' opinions**

### **A. Support for Nai Chan Dein**

Respondents based their support for Nai Chan Dein on desire for local self-determination or a perceived need for protection from SPDC battalions, as might be expected:

Nai Atoo, 45, Kyone Kanya village, Ye Township. "Without a Mon rebel armed force, the government will do whatever they want to do. They have no concern for other groups. So a group like Chan Dein should help our people so that there is a barrier against the abuses by the Burmese army. These kind of groups should always oppose the Burmese armed forces. If Chan Dein and others continue fighting, he can make the government commit less abuse, or even stop the abuse."

Nai Hnee, 50, Halockhatee IDP camp. From 1999 to 2005, this source worked as a local contact, providing information and support for groups including those lead by Nai Chan Dein, Nai Hloin, Nai Bin and San She. Nai Hnee moved his family to Halockhatee after he felt that a local battalion was close to discovering his activities. "If we have no independence, no rule of law and if people are suffering a lot of abuse, armed forces like Chan Dein who oppose the Burmese army should remain," he said.

Interestingly, however, the majority of the respondents who said they supported Nai Chan Dein did so because they felt they needed protection from recently arrived ethnic Burman workers, who they felt to be allied with the army:

Blai Chan, 22, university student from Ayu Taung village, Ye Township. "During 2006, the new arrivals became involved in village administration, in control of the militia and the village security force. Later they started to have influence in the community... every summer we have our Mon literacy school in the village. Right now, it is harassed by the militia and village security force... The new workers also take the products [of the rubber



Ethnic Burman workers using SPDC battalion-owned equipment to process rubber in Ye Township

plantations they work on] and only give 60% or 70% to the plantation owners, and then they bring the other rubber sap to the battalion... they benefit and the battalion benefits too. It seems that the battalion supports them. The villagers know this and they do not want to make conflict with the new arrival groups. Other villages are in the same situation – Khawzar, Hangan, Kaloh, Kyaung-ywa, Aplaing. Chan Dein and his men know about this difficulty and I believe they want to stop this, that is why they are active and fighting with the Burmese troops. That's why I still support Chan Dein. This is necessary for abuse from the battalions and Burmese group on the Mon community because we know this is not fair."

Nai Tin Myint, 38, Hangan native who now lives in Ye Town. Man explained his support for Nai Chan Dein in terms of a single event involving an ethnic Burma worker from middle Burma. In October 2007, Nai Tin Myint said, a 26-year-old worker sexually assaulted a 23-year-old Mon girl as she worked on her father's rubber plantation. Tensions between the Mon and Burman communities in the village subsequently heightened. Fights broke out between young men from both groups and in one case a Mon boy was seriously injured. According to Nai Tin Myint, the incident was ignored by the local Burmese army battalion. "By looking at this incident," said Nai Tin Myint, "we see that we still need an armed force like Chan Dein to stand for us."

Mon woman, Maung Kalin village, close to Ye Town. "Of course they need money because they are fighting the Burmese battalion. That's why they need money, to buy weapons and bullets. That's why the Mon population should provide them with money and some assistance. They are fighting for our nation. Without the Chan Dein group, not only the abuse of the Burmese battalion, but there will be more abuse from Burman people."

Other subjects particularly highlighted the NMSP's inability to prevent abuses, in spite of its ceasefire agreement with the SPDC:

Myint Thein, 25, resident of an NMSP controlled area. "For me, I want there to be groups like Chan Dein's for our people. His kind of group is essential for our people. We have been abused by the different Burmese battalions for my whole life. So nobody can stop them until now. The NMSP has a ceasefire and it seems they cannot stop abuse by the government. So a group like Chan Dein, I believe they can limit the abuse and the activities of the Burmese battalions in southern Mon State. For me, I also want to restore the peace of our lives before the army battalions came to the area. We need to preserve our language and culture. Most of these things have been destroyed by different Burmese groups, and we need to recover them."

Nai Zon Myu, 37, Baan Ton Yan IDP camp, originally from Ye Township. "I support a group like Chan Dein who dares to fight with the government. There should be more troops like this who dare to fight the government as a people's defense force. Because the current ceasefire groups like the NMSP, they do not go against the Burmese troops any more. Not only in fighting, but in other cases too. Advantages and disadvantages go together. If Chan Dein is around, the battalions are afraid to move around to other places. Without Chan Dein, there will be more abuses. There should be 2 or 3 more groups like Chan Dein to make the government troops feel fear."

Mi Yin, 35, Halockhanee IDP camp, originally from Yin Ye village in Ye Township. Mi Yin is the ex wife of an active soldier with the Nai Chan Dein group. "I think my husband did the right thing because there are hundreds of people who were abused in front of me during their daily lives. Even the New Mon State Party could not defend these people from the abuse of the Burmese army. For those who were abused by the Burmese army, they had nowhere to turn too. So instead of staying as a victim, people have to oppose these Burmese troops in their own way. That is what my husband did. I do not find him in the wrong for that, but we have been separated for 1 and ½ years already."

U Pala, 40, a Buddhist Monk from Ye Town, Ye Town. "In some places, the abuses increase day by day...after the ceasefire I think the supporters for the NMSP are getting fewer and fewer because the local people believe that the NMSP could not protect their daily life. So the Chan Dein group appeared to fight with the Burmese

army. Even though they are called robbers, some people in the community who want to change the situation still support them. As a monk, I travel a lot to get donations and make ceremonies and I meet a lot of villagers. Most of them still want a group who still fights with the government and is trying to restore their rights and their self-determination. It seems like most of the population where I travel still wants Chan Dein to fight with the army.”

## **B. Support contingent on criticism**

Some respondents expressed support for Nai Chan Dein, but paired it with a call for him to limit his abuse and taxation:

U Pala, 40, Monk from Ye Town. “But on the other hand, I want to suggest that the Chan Dein group should not abuse the civilians as the Burmese troops abuse the local people. Because if you abuse the people, it will make the people less supportive of your group. To be viable, the armed groups need to get support from outside [overseas]...instead of asking support from the local community. In that way they can maintain their revolution against the Burmese troops.”

Nai Yah, 37, Ex NMSP member, Chedeik IDP camp, relocated from Ma-Gyi village, Ye Township. “[The NMSP] could not prevent abuse done by the government... So the people do not rely on them. Instead, in their minds, they believe in another revolutionary group like Chan Dein’s group. But I want to make a suggestion for the Chan Dein group: when they try to protect the people, they shouldn’t act as a perpetrator like the Burmese government forces [the source is referring to taxation]. But, we should have this kind of group for our nationality.”

Other supporters particularly asked him to rethink his antipathy towards ethnic Burmans and Burmese-speaking ethnic Mons:

Nai Kun Paw, 58, Thailand, relocated from Amae village, Yebyu Township. “The objective of Nai Chan Dein is to fight for freedom. But I don’t think he implements all his objectives. He make a lot of abuses on people, killing people including Burmese people. Collecting money. It makes the people suffer, and he does not benefit the civilians. Now there are more disadvantages than advantages. The abuses cause people to support him and his group less. This doesn’t mean I do not support him. He should protect the rights of the people from the Burmese battalion and not abuse them himself.”

Ko Nyan, 35, Ye Town, ethnic Mon who only speaks Burmese. “If Chan Dein fights for self-determination, for our independence, that would be a great thing. But I think Chan Dein and his group should know clearly about their attitude about Burmese and non-Burmese speakers. Not all Burman people like that current regime. Chan Dein thinks all Burmese speakers belong to the military regime. This is not true...Many Burmese speakers hate the regime. Everybody knows this government is not good for the people.”

Some respondents expressed opposition to Nai Chan Dein, but said they would support him were he to cease taxing or abusing villagers:

Ko Myin Tau, 23, construction worker in Thailand from Khaw-zar, Ye Township. “I want to see Chan Dein as a leader of a real armed force that fights for Mon people. I don’t want to see him as a robber. But we hear a lot about Chan Dein doing bad things against our people.”

Nai Seik, 50, relocated from Pauk Pin Kwin, Ye Township, to Halockhane. “I don’t trust any rebel group. The way they talk and their actions are not the same – they don’t really implement what they say. In reality, they should fight with the government troops. But they don’t fight, they just rob the villagers who have no arms. Chan Dein is a so-called fighter for the Mon revolution, but he is just a leader of robbers. If he was really fighting the Burmese army, I would support him. But he is not fighting them, instead he is just robbing villagers.”

Ma Yin, 38, relocated to Ye Town from a rural village when she married. “So my family, in the first week of December, asked me to transfer them some money to give to the Chan Dein group....My family also had to provide 100,000 kyat already. I think the Chan Dein group is going too far. I don’t think they are doing a good job for our villagers. Nobody wants to pay, but they are afraid of Chan Dein and they have no choice, so they have to pay... I will never support the Chan Dein group if he continues doing like this.”

## **C. Opposition to Nai Chan Dein**

Opposition to Nai Chan Dein rested on two main foundations. The first was a feeling that abuses by SPDC battalions would not occur were Nai Chan Dein not in the area:

Nai Aye, 45, from Yebyu Township. "LIB 282 is blocking us from going outside at night time...I have 3 plantations, but I can only pick 3 days of betel nuts. In the night time, most of my betel nuts are stolen... If I do not change my career, my family cannot survive. Those are the effects of the Chan Dein group on my business. I want them [the Chan Dein group] to move away from my village so the battalion will not block the village any more."

Nai Eain, 42, member of village security force and belongs to VPDC in Yebyu township. "We already paid to members of the Chan Dein group secretly, because we don't want Nyi Nyi Soe to hear about this...I really want Chan Dein to move away from my village. If he continues activity in my village we will have a lot of problems. Nyi Nyi Soe will force us to do [force security] more and more."

Nai Rot Myu, 23, Chedeik IDP camp, relocated from Pauk Pin Kwin village, Ye Township. "I think everyone who lives in the southern part of Ye Township will know about my village... When I was 15, I had already heard about 30 case of villagers being killed by IB No. 31 and LIB No. 343. At the same time, the soldiers raped a lot of Mon women. More than half of our native villagers fled to [IDP camps]... These abuses were because of several armed rebel groups who used to be active in our village. We have a lot of bitter experiences. I don't like any group who has arms. I think my village will never return to its old way again."

The other foundation for opposition to Nai Chan Dein rested on frustration with abuses committed by Nai Chan Dein himself:

Nai Ong Mon, 35, from Ye Township. "I do not see Chan Dein as a leader of rebels but as a leader of robbers...he demands quite large amounts of money...He is not kind. For example, the latest abuse done by him and his group [when he killed 3 and injured 12 Burman workers near Marn Aung village, Ye township] let you see that he is not like a human being. He chooses the way to kill the people. That is not a revolution. It is just killing, the same as the Burmese troops. He and they are the same. I will not accept this kind of abuse."

Young man, Ye Town. "The rubber price has dropped and nobody can earn money very well, and now people will have a lot of trouble paying taxes to the rebels and the battalions. Chan Dein has done a lot of bad things, including killing, kidnapping, beating and extorting money from villagers. The Chan Dein group is not good for the Mon people."

Taxation by the Nai Chan Dein group was particularly singled out as villagers' reasons for withholding their support:

Nai Sein Nyi, 42, Yebyu Township. "We are farmers. We have very small amounts of income. We are too poor to give this large amount of tax [to Nai Chan Dein]. But we have no choice, if we do not give them money we will get trouble soon. We have been forced to pay – this is not our decision. It is not a donation and it is not fair."

Ko Chin We, 30, en route from Alae Sakhan village, Yebyu Township, to find work in Thailand. "I need to go and work [in Thailand] to help my parents. In this year, we have had to provide 300,000 kyat only from my family [to Nai Chan Dein]... No group is good for my family. I will not support Chan Dein."

Questions about how much Nai Chan Dein is really fighting the Burmese army and, relatedly, whether he is fairly using the his tax funds were also raised:

Nai Myint, 45, Khaw-zar. Ye Township. "In my opinion, every armed force needs support. But for the Chan Dein group I think they are disorganized...It is difficult for them, I know that. But I think they should make more clear how they use the money. Now, as we know they are collecting a lot of money...but people do not know how they control the money. Are they really buying the things they need [to fight], or are they just spending money for themselves? Nobody knows."



A villager returning from her rubber plantation in Ye Township, where she must worry about being stopped by both rebels and SPDC army patrols

### Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995, by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- Monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and other areas in southern Burma
- Protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma,

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM produces the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletters. If publication is delayed it is because we are waiting to confirm information, and it comes with our heartfelt apologies.

We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or if you know someone who you think would like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail a name and address to:

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Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director  
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Nai Thein, 52, Way Zin, near NMSP controlled area, relocated from Magyi village. "My opinion is that no armed groups are good for people right now. I do not want to talk about the Burmese troops because they have done too many abuses and everybody knows they are bad. But for the Chan Dein group, I think they also follow in the footsteps of the Burmese army...Chan Dein has been collecting large amounts of money. These large amounts of money, I do not think they are going to use to fight the Burmese. There are few armed clashes between the Burmese soldiers and Mon armed groups. So I think they money is going into their pockets and they are not doing a good job for the people. Please go to other villages and hear the voice of people and you will hear them talking like me. Nobody will support the Burmese battalions or Chan Dein."

## D. Opposition to all armed groups

A number of respondents said they opposed all groups with weapons because their power made them likely to become abusers:

Ko Thet Oo, 25, Ye Town, orriganlly from Apalaing village. "I will never support any armed group. If they have arms, I believe they will commit abuse because of their weapons. This is my experience of how armed groups have been treating our people...There are too many abuses because of the armed forces in my village right now... All villagers from our village including me, we all want to live our lives in a peaceful way. So we don't like any armed groups."

Nai Jaw, Han Gan village, relocated from Toe-tet-ywa-thit, Ye Township. "If I still lived in Toe-tet-ywa-thit, I wouldn't be able to find food for my family and my children would starve because that village has been closed for a long time by LIB 343...When we lived there, I had to pay [the army every month]. When my family left, the rebels also said we were to pay support funds for them...As for me, I don't want to support anybody with arms. I believe that as long as they have weapons they will abuse the civilians. They are poison for the people."

Daw Than Sink, 50, Kyone Kanya village, southern Ye, next to Yindin village. "We have been blocked in the village for a long time with no getting in or out...But the problem is, I have to [leave the village to earn money for food]. This is all because of the Mon rebel group launching their operations against the Burmese troops. In my opinion, no one is good for us. Neither the Chan Dein group nor Burmese troops are good for us. We are just villagers with no arms and no power."

Sadness about abuses and exhaustion with decades of violence at the hands of armed groups also drove respondents lack of support:

Nai Htun Naung, 45, Khaw-zar. Ye Township. "For me, I don't want to support Chan Dein or the Burmese Army. They are both armed groups. And for nearly one decade, people have suffered a lot from both groups."

Most of the people from my village relocated to other places because rebel groups have been active near our home."

Ma San San, 36, relocated from Han Gan to Kyaun Gwe, southern Ye Township. "Every moment we have to be afraid of the Chan Dein group and the Burmese battalions, in the day and in the night. We have no peace in our village... Han Gan village used to be a very happy place... Everything happening in my village is because of the armed groups – the government troops and Chan Dein. In my opinion, I don't want any of them. Hopefully, one day I can go back and live in my village."



An IDP from Pauk Pin Kwin village, Ye Township, who fled abuse by both SPDC soldiers and Mon rebels

## V. Conclusion

Many villagers interviewed by HURFOM were willing to espouse their support for the Nai Chan Dein group, in spite of its sometimes-abusive practices and the ever-present threat of punishment by SPDC battalions. Interestingly, few explained their support in terms of a desire to regain the independence of past Mon kingdoms. Instead, their support and desire for self-rule were couched in terms of relief from daily SPDC abuses or the perceived threat of newly arriving ethnic Burman workers. Other interview subjects, however, expressed strong opposition to the Nai Chan Dein group or qualified their support with the requirement that the group protect villagers and respect that their support should be voluntary. In many cases, villagers expressed their exhaustion and desire simply for peace, and said they distrusted all groups bearing arms, regardless of whether they were lead by Nai Chan Dein, the government or otherwise.

To ensure a modicum of continuity, this report focused only villager opinions of the Nai Chan Dein group. Such a narrow scope surely means that many of the villager opinions apply only to Nai Chan Dein, whose infamy abounds. Many of the respondents, however, made more sweeping statements about their feelings of opposition, support or ambivalence for armed insurgency in general. Though no holistic conclusions about local sentiment towards insurgency should be drawn from this, this report is designed to give voice to local residents on whose behalf war is ostensibly being waged. This should complicate the assumption that local residents are a homogenous opinion block, uniformly desiring armed protection from SPDC abuse. Paying honest attention to these opinions is always important, but it will take on added urgency as the SPDC's 2010 election approaches. Pressure on ceasefire groups like the NMSP to join the election will likely lead to tensions and even threaten existing ceasefire agreements. With this as a background, the point of this report, then, is simply to stress that local opinions on conflict are diverse, and not necessarily in support of renewed armed struggle.

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